

Philosophy Q and A

Philosophy is the word for the general understandings (“tools of analysis”) that are needed for all other understandings. “Philosophy” means “love of wisdom”.

Imagine a plane. It is a flat surface that extends infinitely in all directions.

Such a plane divides the universe in two. But this division has no effect, because both halves of the universe are infinitely large.

Create a boundary on the plane. It can be a rectangle. It has dimension; it can be measured in two directions.

Inside the bounded area, or field, there may be variety. For example, there may be black and white. It may be that within the limits of the field, whatever is not black is white. This can be called a “dichotomy”. It covers the entire field, and whatever is not of one category, belongs to the other.

It used to be said that under apartheid fascism, whatever was not forbidden, was compulsory. Thus it was a dichotomy.

Dichotomy makes analysis possible. A mixed basket can be analysed into apples and oranges, for example. The apples do not opposed the oranges, but only share the basket.

There are many examples of this kind of analysis. It is useful.

Spinoza said: “*Determinatio est negatio.*” In Latin, this means that naming something, also names its negative counterpart. So, to say “up”, means that there must also be a “down”. To say “light”, means there was dark.

In a dichotomy, the categories co-exist.

Dialectical understanding means more. It means that the parts within a system not only define each other, but also struggle against each other. They interact. They have a relationship that is not simply given by the fact of being contained within a common boundary, like the apples and the oranges in a basket.

A dialectical system sustains its own boundary, or unity. A dialectical system creates its own motion. It must change. It is incapable of remaining unchanged.

Q and A

Q. What is true knowledge?

A. People must prove the truth in practice.

Epistemology

Q. What is logic?

A. Logic is dialectical.

Logic

Q. What is real?

A. Reality is the object seen by the subject.

Metaphysics

Q. What is good?

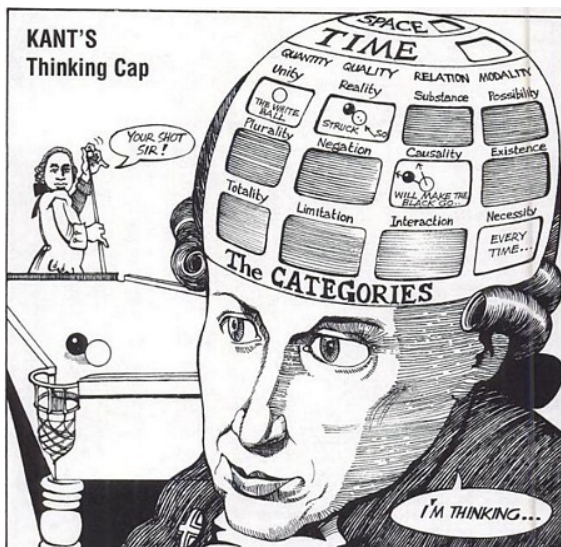
A. Freedom is the good that contains all goods.

Ethics

Q. What is beauty?

A. Truth is beauty; beauty, truth.

Aesthetics



Cartoon from "Philosophy for Beginners"



G W F Hegel

The greatest dialectical unity-and-struggle-of-opposites is that between human beings and the universe in which they live. This is the dialectic of mind and matter. It is the dialectic of human subject and material object.

Change within a system is intrinsic. It can be explained. Change from outside, called extrinsic change, is accidental. Accidents happen. They are part of the material environment. But accidents cannot be explained or predicted from within a system.

A football is a unity-and-struggle-of-opposites. The pressurised air inside it pushes outwards, while the cover pulls inward, retaining the air.

When the football is kicked, from outside, it rolls, flies or bounces. It comes to rest, waiting for another kick. If no kick comes, the ball will change, slowly. It will deflate. Eventually it will rot. These are examples of extrinsic and intrinsic change.

To understand a system, take the abstract parts of it, one by one. Then assemble the parts so as to understand it in full, as a unity-and-struggle-of-opposites.

This kind of mental construction is called “Ascent from abstract to concrete.” In philosophy, concrete means a whole, while abstract refers to a part of the whole.

In philosophy we talk of a living thing, or equivalent, as being “organic”, because the appropriate parts make up a living body. The negation of “organic” is “eclectic”, where the parts do not make up a systemic or living whole. In common parlance an eclectic group of things may be called a “laundry list” or a “rag-bag” so as to indicate that it is not a system, but only an accidental collection of objects.

Life is organic. Beauty is organic.

Hegel said: *“What is rational is real.”*

Life, being organic, is also dialectical, and it develops dialectically. Life is development. Human life is rational development.

Freedom is the recognition of necessity, and freedom is necessary for human development.

“In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” (Communist Manifesto, 1848)

Freedom is the good that contains all other goods.